

SCHOENHOFEN BREWERY POWERHOUSE

Preliminary Summary of Information
February 6, 1978

Commission on Chicago Historical
and Architectural Landmarks

SCHOENHOFEN BREWERY POWERHOUSE
Eighteenth Street and Canalport Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

Architects: Richard E. Schmidt and Hugh Garden

Date of Construction: 1902

Chicago's first brewery, J. & W. Crawford's, was opened in 1835. Reportedly the unpalatable quality of the Crawford's brew drove William Lill and William Haas to borrow money from Chicago's mayor, William B. Ogden, to start the city's second brewery. In 1839, they opened at Pine Street, now Michigan Avenue, and Chicago Avenue, producing nine barrels a week. A third brewery, Carney's, opened in 1840 on South Water Street between State Street and Wabash Avenue.

By 1860, fourteen breweries were operating in the city, making beer from barley and hops brought to Chicago from as far away as the East and West coasts. The large influx of Germans to the city after 1848 provided brewmasters and the market for an expanding business. By 1890, thirty-four breweries were in operation and over ten million dollars worth of beer was produced annually, making Chicago the nation's sixth largest producer. Consumption, however, outstripped production and placed the city in second position: 2,800,000 barrels drunk in a year exceeded only by New York City's 5,000,000 barrels.

One of the early brewery owners was Peter Schoenhofen. He was born in Derbach, Prussia, on February 2, 1827, came to America in 1851, and moved to Chicago. Forming a partnership with Matheus Gottfried, a newly arrived immigrant from Sofheim, Germany, he opened a small brewery at Twelfth and Jefferson streets in 1860. Two years later, the expanding business moved to a newly built brewery at Eighteenth Street and Canalport Avenue. In 1866, Gottfried sold his share of the company to Schoenhofen who ran the Schoenhofen Brewing Company until his death in 1893. In 1934, the company merged with Edelweiss Brewery to become the Schoenhofen Edelweiss Breweries which in 1957 became a division of Drewry's Limited.

The Schoenhofen Brewery Powerhouse was added to the Eighteenth Street brewery in 1902 to house the powerplant for the brewery and for the storage of hops. The site is located at the intersection

of Eighteenth Street, Seward Street, and Canalport Avenue. The powerhouse is an irregularly-shaped, five-sided brick structure. The main side parallels Canalport Avenue, one extremely narrow side faces toward Eighteenth Street, and a third side parallels Seward Street. A fourth side parallels the alley to the north of Canalport, and the fifth side runs along the east side of the property.

The building has four stories and a basement. A load bearing structure, the interior of the powerhouse is supported by steel beams and columns encased in concrete for fireproofing. The building sits on a high base of smoothly finished Indiana limestone. This same stone frames a small door on Eighteenth Street and is used in the large entrance on Canalport Avenue. A tower containing stairs, elevator, and at the top a water tank, is located near the center of the building behind the main entrance on Canalport. The tower and the arched main entrance are the two most prominent features of the structure.

The Canalport elevation is divided into five bays, separated by brick piers with wider piers at the two corners. Four bays are divided into three windows each with narrow piers between them; the fifth bay has only two windows separated by a single narrow pier.

The first story is separated by a broad band of brick from the upper stories which are treated as a single unit. All of the windows are set deeply into the wall surface, emphasizing the bearing capacity of the wall. The spandrels of the third and fourth stories are also recessed. The piers, however, are continuous, set flush with one another, with the masonry band between the first and second stories, and with the parapet wall at the top of the building.

To the right of the middle of the Canalport side but in line with the central bay is the main entrance. This doorway served primarily as a loading dock. The opening is framed by a limestone arch, the stones of which radiate outward, some as much as seven feet, to describe a larger rectangle. The edges of this rectangle and the curve of the arch are outlined by raised lines of stone. Above the arch is an extended H-shaped cartouche in which appears the legend "P. Schoenhofen Brewing Co." The arch is a barrel vault superimposed on a narrower rectangular opening, giving the appearance of a keyhole. The opening extends into the building, providing a deep recess, and creating a strong shadow that emphasizes the thickness of the wall.

The wall above the fourth story is a simple parapet, capped by a terra-cotta coping. On the Canalport side, the design of the tower follows that of the bays beneath. Two brick piers form the corners, separated by a recessed wall divided into three parts by two narrow piers. A single window is located in the center section near the middle of the tower; three windows are

near the top. A parapet terminates the tower. The Eighteenth Street side of the building is extremely narrow. The corner piers are turned inward to meet the planes of the Canalport and Seward sides at right angles. At street level is the small limestone-framed door to which a flat canopy and glass block sidelights have since been added. Above the door, in line with the other first story windows, was a window which has since been bricked-up. The second-, third-, and fourth-story windows are treated as a single unit, one window per story, separated by recessed spandrels.

The Seward Street elevation is divided vertically as well as horizontally, due to the two functions which the building was to serve. These two internal purposes are expressed on the exterior. The southern half is identical to the Canalport side; this part of the structure was used for storage. The northern half, however, is divided into only two stories. The taller lower story, with five windows, housed the boilers. The upper story, with seven windows, housed the coal bins.

When the building was no longer needed as a powerhouse, the boilers were removed and the floors reconstructed to conform to the four levels of the storage area. Today, the interior is typical warehouse space: open floor areas interrupted only by the columns needed to support the interior loads and by the base of the tower.

The exterior design of the building is boldly articulated through an expressive and vigorous use of brick. This treatment became a characteristic of the work of the building's architects, Richard Schmidt and Hugh Garden, and sets the Schoenhofen Powerhouse apart from the typical warehouse and factory structures of the period.

The association of Richard Ernest Schmidt and Hugh Mackie Garden had begun at least ten years prior to the formation of the firm of Richard E. Schmidt, Garden, and Martin in 1906. Richard Schmidt (1865-1958) was born in Bavaria. He emigrated to America and received his secondary education in Chicago. After studying architecture for a brief time at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he returned to Chicago where he began his practice in 1887. Hugh Garden (1873-1961) was born in Toronto and emigrated to Minneapolis at age fourteen. There he was apprenticed to the architect William Channing Whitney. Garden's architectural training was thus of a practical nature and not one of formal education. He moved to Chicago where he worked as a draftsman first for the firm of Flanders and Zimmerman, later for Henry Ives Cobb, and then for the firm of Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge. Out of work due to the depression of 1893, he set himself up as a free-lance designer and draftsman. This brought him into association with Chicago's top architects, including Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright. He soon met Richard Schmidt who asked him to take charge of design in Schmidt's office around 1895.

This association, which was to last their lifetime, was similar to that of Daniel Burnham and John Root. Schmidt, like Burnham, was primarily a businessman who brought commissions into the office. Garden, like Root, was more the artist and sensitive designer. He took charge of commissions in the office and produced the accomplished design work of the team.

The firm had a diverse clientele. They were architects of polite residential structures such as the Joseph Theurer House (1895; now known as the P.K. Wrigley House, 2644 North Lake View Avenue) and the Albert Madlener House (1902; 4 West Burton Place). However, their partnership soon developed a reputation for commercial and industrial buildings, a type which was largely neglected by the architectural profession. In fact, some of the best work of Schmidt, Garden, and Martin's association is found in such industrial structures of which the Schoenhofen powerhouse is an excellent example.

Russell Sturgis, an architectural critic writing in the Architectural Record of March 1905, observed that:

No school of architecture can teach a man how to design such buildings as this brewery (Schoenhofen Powerhouse). At least, if there be any school of architecture of that stamp, it should really proclaim itself--its power of inspiring liberal and practical ideas in the youthful mind should be widely advertised. As things are, we dread the going of a student to an architectural school, and we dread accepting him as an assistant when he leaves that school; and this because of the perfunctory nature of what he learns there. No blame to anyone! He would be a bold professor of architecture who would try and lead his boys to the designing of things according to the requirements of the situation.

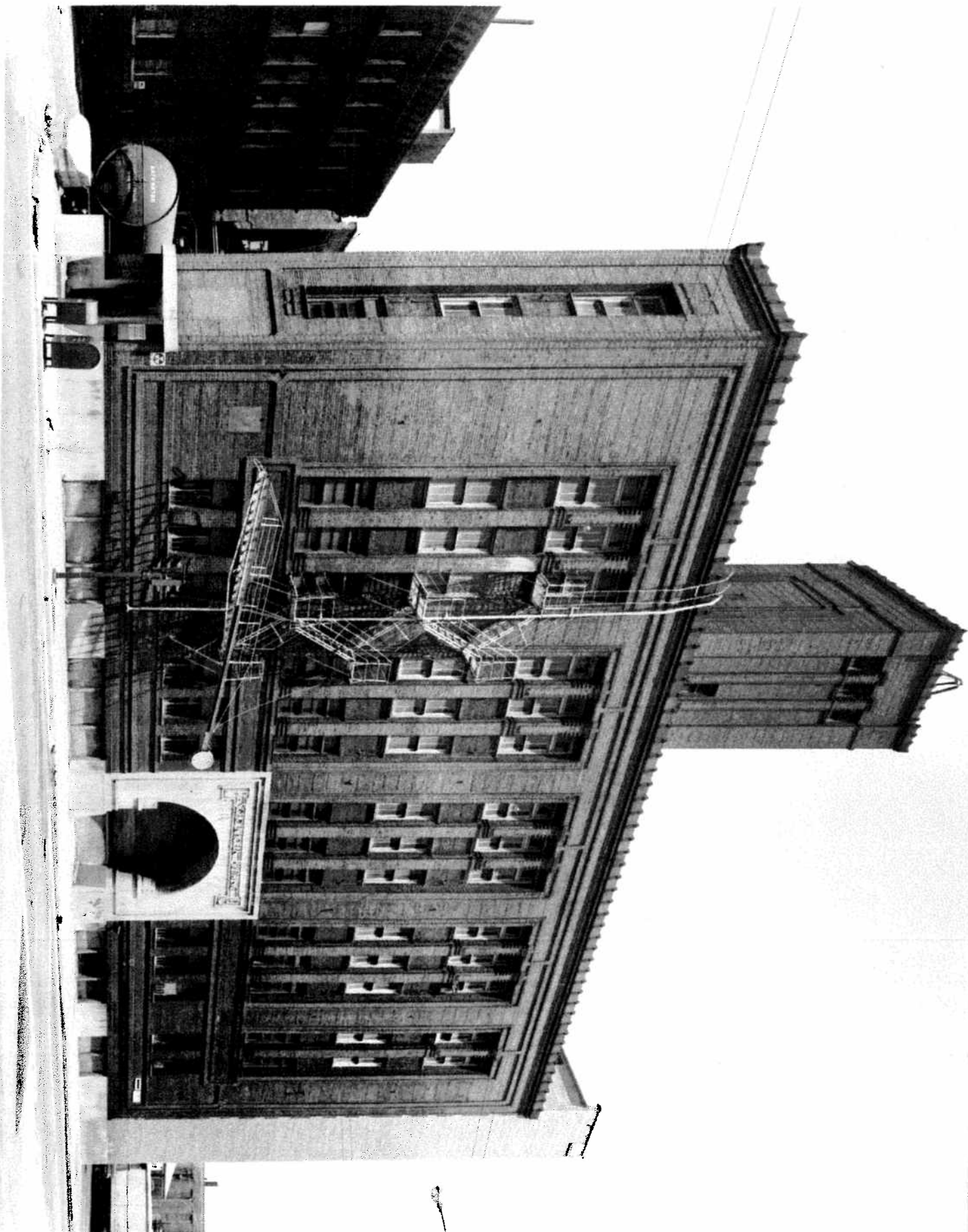
The practice of architecture in Chicago at the turn of the century was anything but perfunctory. The early work of the Chicago school pioneers such as Sullivan and Root, and the younger generation led by Frank Lloyd Wright which was developing the architecture known today as the Prairie school, created an atmosphere in which the search for the "requirements of the situation" was primary. These architects were seeking solutions that were not based upon tradition, in particular the classical heritage of western civilization that led architect to house banks in Greek temples. Inspired by the broad horizon of the Midwestern prairie, interested in the materials of nature and the nature of materials, the innovators of the Prairie school searched the environment for contemporary solutions to twentieth-century problems.

The work of Schmidt and Garden matured in this period. The Schoenhofen Brewery Powerhouse is an early product of this search. The fabric of the powerhouse is common brick, highly textured and of earth tones. It was hard-burned in a kiln on a bed of sand in order to produce a roughened surface on the brick's long sides, called stretchers. The short ends of the brick, called headers, were wire-cut: the clay after being formed in long rectangular sections was sliced with a wire to brick dimensions. This produced an even coarser surface than the sandy stretchers and when baked, the headers turn a darker color. The brick's long edges were rounded to add texture to the finished masonry.

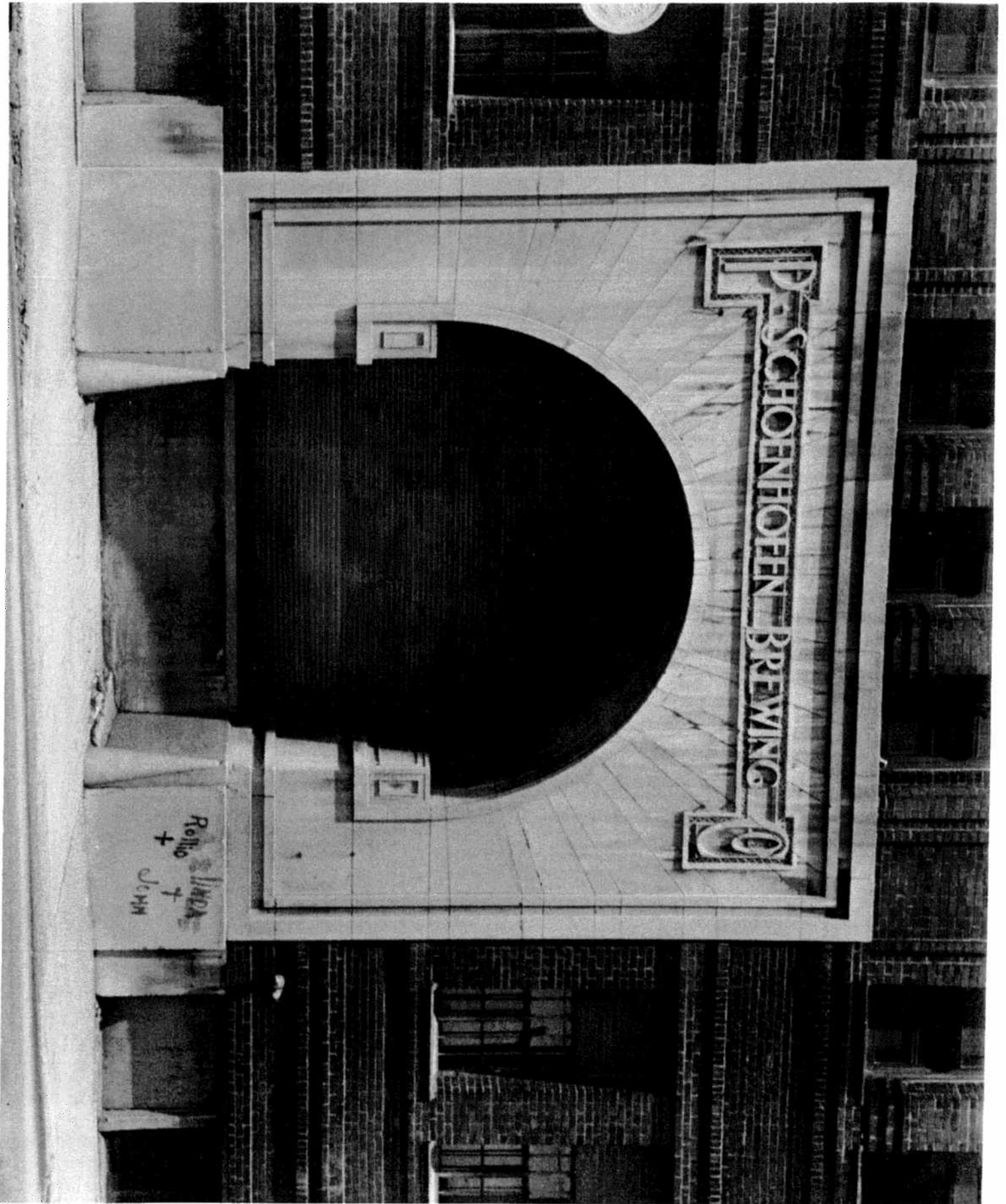
The powerhouse is a strong geometric block, solid and dense. The design is a statement in brick, produced by architects using the art of masonry for its fullest expressiveness. Variations in the laying of the bricks create the vigorous appearance of the structure. The detail is part of the structure and not an applique unrelated to the building and its underlying principles. The design is articulated and strengthened by a strong outlining that emphasizes its structural purpose. Courses of brick, the headers turned outward, create rectangular patterns against the flat striated brickwork of the wall. In this arrangement of brick, called American bond, every sixth course of brick is placed perpendicularly to the surface, the headers facing outward. Because the headers are a darker color, a band or stripe occurs at every sixth layer of brick in contrast to the lighter-colored stretcher courses. The decorative brickwork on the piers also relies upon the arrangement and color characteristic of the brick. By simply maneuvering the header or stretcher outward and by extending or recessing certain bricks from the wall, a bold geometric design is created.

While working on the powerhouse in 1902, Schmidt and Garden designed a house for Albert Madlener on the Near North Side (the Madlener House was designated a Chicago Landmark on March 22, 1973). Although the Madlener House and the powerhouse serve obviously different needs, their designs are related to one another and are good examples of the character of Schmidt and Garden's work. Both are solid geometric forms with strong masonry qualities. Madlener House is built with an expensive pressed brick and limestone; the powerhouse is built with a highly textured common brick and limestone. The masonry of the house forms a striped pattern; more subtly so in the powerhouse. Both are a curious interplay between symmetry and a deliberate disregard of symmetry. The rigid symmetry of the square-like Madlener House is set askew by its off-center entrance much as the powerhouse's entrance arch is set off-center in the building's larger rectangular form. The powerhouse shows that the thought and care given by Schmidt and Garden to the design of a factory building was no less than they would give to any other commission. Although the materials may not be as luxurious and refined, the design process does not suffer.

Today, the Schoenhofen Brewery Powerhouse stands empty, a part of the vacant brewery complex. Brewing beer is no longer a part of Chicago's diverse economy. The powerhouse, however, remains as a part of the city's unique and vital architectural treasury and industrial history. The area around Eighteenth Street and Canalport Avenue is now under study by the city's Department of Urban Renewal for possible redevelopment. The future of the powerhouse is uncertain. Renewal brings with it the opportunity to once more use this structure, adapting its interior to new uses, and putting it back into productivity, thereby ensuring its future. Demolition of the Schoenhofen Brewery Powerhouse would be wasteful of resources whereas its conservation would not only preserve an important example of Chicago's architectural heritage but would also demonstrate a commitment to this heritage and to the principles of adaptive reuse.



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Rollo + Linda
+ John

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